Flash MX 2004 KillerTips

The hottest collection of cool tips and hidden secrets for Flash

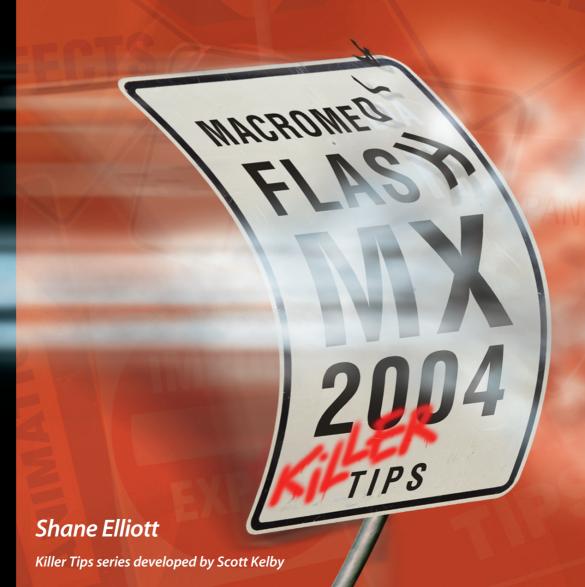




Killer Tips series developed by Scott Kelby

Flash VIX 2004 KIILETTIPS

The hottest collection of cool tips and hidden secrets for Flash



MACROMEDIA® FLASH™ MX 2004 KILLER TIPS

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To my Mom, Cheryl, whose guidance, love, and understanding has simply made me a better man.

To Chad and Stephanie, for continually making me proud to be their brother.

Finally, to Mammaw, whose unconditional support has given me strength when I thought I had none left.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Anytime you see an acknowledgment page in a book you think, "Oh god, here we go. The guy's gonna start kissing butt." Well, what choice do I have? In all seriousness, there are a lot of people to thank, and it's sort of like making an Oscar speech since you have to get to everyone in one page. So, I'll start out by thanking the person who made this book come to life...Me. Okay, I'm talking about Linda Bump, Senior Acquisitions Editor at New Riders. From beginning to end, she pushed without being pushy, inspired, and was just plain wonderful to work with. She owes me a coffee and I plan to collect. I'd also like to thank Lisa Thibault (development editor) and Robert M. Hall and Kim Cavanaugh (technical editors) for their swift turnaround and very warm, supportive attitudes. It's very important to feel like you're collaborating instead of being criticized, and that is certainly how I was made to feel.

Everyone I work with at OTX Research from the top down. Shelley Zalis, Kristin Luck, Amit Kzemian, and everyone in the Engineering department who make coming into the office something that I can actually look forward to, and trust me, that's a difficult thing to do.

David Fugate, my literary agent at Waterside Productions, was arguably the only reason this book came to fruition. Having a lot going on at the time, I was reluctant to believe I could make a book like this happen and happen well. David, you inspired me to forge ahead and had faith that it was possible. For that, I thank you. Have your people call my people and we'll do lunch.

Of course no one could write a book about Flash MX 2004 unless there was such a thing, so for that I'd like to thank Macromedia. Henriette Cohn and Heather Holleander specifically made getting information on the product an easy task and offered every opportunity to learn the most possible about such a great release of Flash. I would have had a hard time writing about the changes in Flash MX 2004 if it weren't for these wonderful women and the developers and engineers as a whole.

I've saved my personal thank you's for the end. Everyone has challenges in their life and none of us could overcome them without help from people who believe in us when no one else does, not even yourself. Fortunately I have several such people in my life. I'd especially like to thank Wendy Donovan for being such a source of honesty and understanding, and for her attempts at tolerating my moods. Frank Krueger, Chris Pauley, Trevor Boelter, Greg Adler, Martin Barter, and the rest of my close friends for many nights of sushi, helping me to stay creatively fulfilled, and reminding me that laughter is the root of all evil. One last thing... "I got a fever, and the only prescription is more cow bell." If you get that, then I thank you too.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Shane Elliott

After a long career as a student of computer sciences at several universities, including North Carolina State, Elon College, and Cal State Los Angeles, Shane's curiosity and thorough training has led him in directions even he himself could not have predicted. Although he has always been very visually oriented and creative, his skills always led him toward the more technical aspects of web and new media development.

This all changed when Shane shifted focus to design while working at a broadband search company known as Rampt. Rampt broke new ground by offering a fully functional search engine, which at the time operated completely in Flash 4. Ever since his introduction to Flash 4, Shane has followed the growth of Flash as a developing product. He has worked closely with every new release and, as a result, has been honored with awards from Macromedia Site of the Day, Invision 2000, and The Bandies 2000, as well as a nomination in the Flash Forward Film Festival in New York.

Given Shane's knowledge of programming, mixed with Flash design skills and gravitational personality, it was only a matter of time before he began to teach others the relatively new art of Flash design. While teaching at Moviola and American Media Training, he realized that sharing his knowledge with others was the next step he wanted to take. Making this a priority opened doors into authoring material for the Flash MX Bible, ActionScript MX Bible, and The Flash Animator. Having written screenplays, plays, and short stories throughout his career in design, the authoring bug had bitten long ago and making the transition into writing was a natural progression. Most recently, Shane partnered with long-time friend and colleague, Robert Reinhardt, to develop an online introductory course for Flash MX that is offered at universities all over the country.

In the recent past, Shane has applied his rich mixture of skills by working with a variety of clients, such as Infiniti, Energizer, Crest National, Toyota, TBWA Chiat / Day, and Saatchi & Saatchi. He continues to broaden his experiences by developing rich web and stand-alone Flash applications for private sources and hopes to continue growing in all directions that are made available to him. If there are creative avenues to be taken, Shane will continue to find and pursue each and every one of them.

If you'd like to keep up to date with what Shane is doing, visit his web site at www.timberfish.com.

ABOUT THE TECHNICAL REVIEWERS

These reviewers contributed their considerable hands-on expertise to the entire development process for *Macromedia Flash MX 2004 Killer Tips*. As the book was being written, these dedicated professionals reviewed all the material for technical content, organization, and flow. Their feedback was critical to ensuring that *Macromedia Flash MX 2004 Killer Tips* fits our reader's need for the highest quality technical information.



Kim Cavanaugh is a teacher for the School District of Palm Beach County (Florida), where he has been teaching middle-school students web design using Dreamweaver, Fireworks, and Flash since 1999. Kim is also an adjunct professor at Palm Beach Community College, where he teaches Dreamweaver and Flash.

The author of two beginner's guide titles for Dreamweaver and Fireworks (Osborne/McGraw-Hill), Kim has also developed course materials for the Learning Library (UK) and contributed to the *Macromedia Studio MX Bible* (Wiley). Kim has contributed numerous articles to Macromedia DevNet and writes extensively for Community MX.com, covering the full range of Studio MX products.

Prior to beginning his career as an educator, Kim worked for ten years as a custom furniture designer and manufacturer, and was a Field Artillery officer in the U.S. Army. He is a graduate of Stetson University (Deland, Florida), with a degree in Political Science.

Kim lives in West Palm Beach with his wife and daughter and loves all things associated with life in South Florida—especially warm weather, the Miami Dolphins, in-shore fishing, and Jimmy Buffett tunes.



A native of Fort Lauderdale, Florida, **Robert M. Hall** has been involved with computers and technology for more than 20 years in several fields, ranging from design and prepress work to enterprise-level architecture and programming of next-generation ATM machines, kiosks, coin counters, and wireless applications for financial and banking industries. Robert maintains his own corporate entity, Feasible Impossibilities, through which he does contract work and speaking engagements. He also maintains a web site covering Flash-related news, articles, and a personal blog of his projects and items of interest. The all-Flash version is available at www.impossibilities.com, and his html-based blog is available at

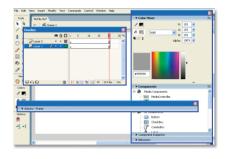
www.impossibilities.com/blog. Robert's published work can be found in chapters he contributed to the books *Flash MX Magic* and *Flash Enabled*, both published by New Riders; a chapter in the *Flash MX Bible*, published by Wiley; and several online articles for InformIt.com. Robert also contributed to the development of the exams currently in use by Macromedia for both Flash 5 and Flash MX Certified Professional programs. His most recent work can be found in an article written for the Flash Development Center on Macromedia DevNet located at www.macromedia.com/devnet/mx/flash/articles/amfphp.html.

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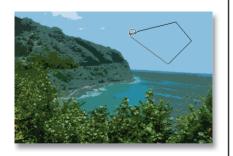












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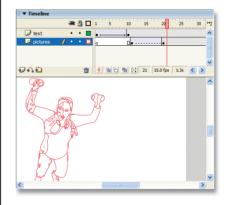
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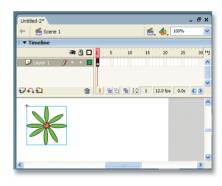
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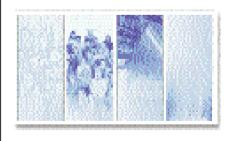
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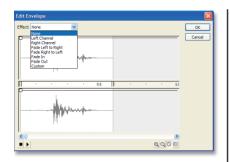
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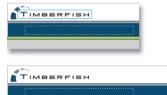
















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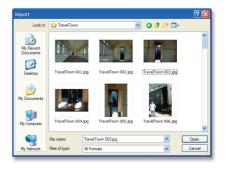
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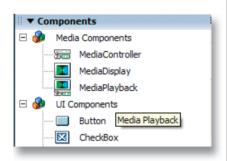














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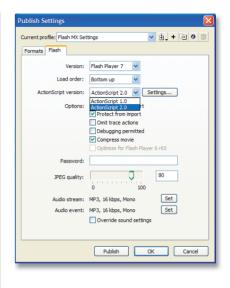
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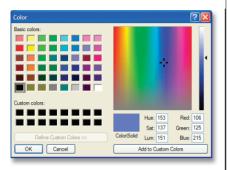
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TELL US WHAT YOU THINK

As the reader of this book, you are the most important critic and commentator. We value your opinion and want to know what we're doing right, what we could do better, what areas you'd like to see us publish in, and any other words of wisdom you're willing to pass our way.

As Senior Acquisitions Editor for New Riders Publishing, I welcome your comments. You can fax, email, or write me directly to let me know what you did or didn't like about this book—as well as what we can do to make our books stronger. When you write, please be sure to include this book's title, ISBN, and author, as well as your name and phone or fax number. I will carefully review your comments and share them with the author and editors who worked on the book.

Please note that I cannot help you with technical problems related to the topic of this book, and that due to the high volume of email I receive, I might not be able to reply to every message.

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Why I Wrote This Book

t's a funny story, actually. I was sitting alone in my apartment having just watched *Terms of Endearment* for the fifth time, and I was still crying when the phone rang. It was the President. He said, "Shane, I need to ask you a favor. I need you to write a book and I need that book to change the world." I replied, "I'll do it, but I need to know all about Area 51, one hundred thousand dollars, and a lifetime subscription to *Marie Claire*." Okay, so one out of three ain't bad. After I finished looking at the alien bodies, I got right to work on this book.

So, there is an actual reason that I wrote this book. This series of books created by Scott Kelby already includes two other programs that I use on a regular basis: Dreamweaver and Photoshop. To be honest, I had only heard of the *Killer Tips* series of books and had never read one at all. When I was told that an opportunity to write one was coming up, I was a little apprehensive. I had no idea of the content or what such a book would require of me. After looking over the Dreamweaver and Photoshop books that had come before, the decision was easy. I thought, "Flash designers need a book like this!" Actually, if nothing else, I wanted to compile all the tips I had run across or discovered in my years of using Flash so that I could have a quick reference. Let's face it: When you read through a magazine, the first thing

you look at is the photos or the balloon text in the margins of *Marie Claire*. Well, you won't find anything in the margins of this book because everything in it is a margin tip. The entire book is just a collection of Flash tips that will help you work better and faster, and ultimately get a call from the President yourself.

Is This Book for You?

I don't know how this book wouldn't be for you. I know every author toots his own horn this way, but honestly I wrote a book that, had someone else written it, I would want to own. When it comes to Flash, we all know that the program is ever-expanding and continually becoming more complex. That means more shortcuts to get things done. Since there are so many tips like this, I always had a hard time remembering them all or at least remembering to use them all. So to be honest, this book is as much for me as it is for you. Which is kind of strange. I mean, I'm sitting working, and then I go to my own book as a reference.

I know what you're saying. "Where can I get a free subscription to Marie Claire?" Well, maybe I can put in a good word for you with the White House. In the meantime, try asking yourself this question instead... "If Flash is so huge and robust, couldn't you have put in 10,000 tips?" Of course I could have. I could have made every little shortcut in the entire program into a tip, but then the book would be 3,000 pages and very hard to flip through or use as a reference. What I've done is

chosen the tips that have always helped and excited me. These are what I consider to be "Killer Tips." There were many times while writing that I would come across a tip that I always knew, but just seldom used. I actually became excited while rediscovering them, and I think whether you are discovering or rediscovering them, you will too. Because the book was written to be a collection of the best tips for everyone, from the beginner to the expert, I know for a fact this book is for you. If it's not for you, go ahead and buy it just to make sure.

Okay, How Do I Begin?

Start by taking out a fresh envelope, putting \$1,000 inside, and sending it to New Riders c/o Shane Elliott. Okay, now you're ready to start the book. Actually, as with any other book, you might think you should begin by flipping to the first page of the tips and going from there. However, this book was not intended to be read straight through. Ultimately, I wrote the book to be a categorized collection of tips, and you can jump from one page to the next to find the kind of stuff you need without having to read through the entire book. You don't need any special software (other than Flash MX 2004, of course); there's no CD-ROM included with a bunch of tutorials that can be confusing and hard to manage.

Keep in mind that I spell out each step for each tip, so if you're an avid Flash user, don't get frustrated if you see (CTRL-F8) every time I mention converting something to a symbol. The tips are designed to operate completely on their own, and most of them don't require you to even have read anything else in the book to be effective. Just flip to any page of the book and start applying these useful hints. It's as simple as that.

Is This Book for Macintosh, Windows, or Both?

Because there's no CD-ROM or any additional software required, this book is for any and all Flash MX 2004 users. Because this release of Flash MX runs under OS X on the Mac side, you'll need to have that, but I'm sure you figured that out when you bought the program. Of course since Flash looks slightly different on the Mac than on a PC, you will notice that some of your screens may not be identical to mine, but luckily Macromedia has made sure that Flash works exactly the same on the Mac as it does on Windows. The only true variations you'll see is that the keyboard shortcuts are different. But, guess what...I actually put in both sets

of shortcuts throughout. How about that? You love me, right?

How to Use This Book

This book can be used for many different things. You can put it on your coffee table to increase your social status amongst friends. You can use it to even out a lopsided table. You can roll it up and smack someone in the head. Or, you can actually read the thing every now and then. I'd recommend the latter. What I do is just make sure this is with me when I work. When it's by my side, I feel like I can always jump to a page and find just the thing I need. I hope you will find this, too.

Make sure to check out www.killerflashtips.com, where you can find copy updates, corrections, and even additional tips that are discovered after the book's release.

What Not to Do

There's one thing that you must never do when reading this book. I mean it—this is really, really important, and if you do this, you may never be the same again. I saw one guy do this thing, and he just ended up sitting in his chair and drooling on himself for the years that followed. It was really strange and I can't quite explain it, but take my word for it. Don't go flipping through my book looking for sidebar tips. They just aren't there. Because the entire book is sidebar tips. Oh, and don't ever tell anyone about my *Marie Claire* subscription. It's personal and people might get the wrong idea.

Flash MX 2004 Killer Tips

Edited by Scott Kelby

Welcome to Flash MX 2004 Killer Tips. As Editor for the Killer Tips series, I can't tell you how excited and truly gratified I am to see this concept of creating a book that is cover-to-cover nothing but tips, extend from my original book (Photoshop Killer Tips) into Flash MX 2004 Killer Tips.

If you were writing a book, and you had

TIP

a really cool tip, an amazing trick, or an inside secret or shortcut. you wouldn't bury it among hundreds of paragraphs of text. You'd make it stand out: You'd put a box around it, maybe put a tint behind it, and if it was really cool (and short and sweet), you'd get everybody's attention by starting with the word "Tip!"

The idea for this series of books came to me when I was at the bookstore looking through the latest Photoshop books on the shelf. I found myself doing the same thing to every book I picked up: I'd turn the page until I found a paragraph that started with the word "Tip." I'd read the tip, then I'd keep turning until I found another sidebar tip. I soon realized I was hooked on tips, because I knew that if I were writing the book that's where I'd put all my best material. Think about it: If you were writing a book, and you had a really cool tip, an amazing trick, or an inside secret or shortcut, you wouldn't bury it among hundreds of paragraphs of text. No way! You'd make it stand out: You'd put a box around it, maybe put a tint behind it, and if it was really cool (and short and sweet), you'd get everybody's attention by starting with the word "Tip!"

That's what got me thinking. Obviously, I'm not the only one who likes these tips, because almost every software book has them. There's only one problem: There's never enough of them. And I thought, "Wouldn't it be great if there were a book that was nothing but those cool little tips?" (Of course, the book wouldn't actually have sidebars, since what's in the sidebars would be the focus: nothing but cool shortcuts, inside secrets, slick ways to do the things we do everyday, but faster—and more fun than ever!) That was the book I really wanted, and thanks to the wonderful people at New Riders, that's the book they let me write (along with my co-author and good friend Felix Nelson). It was called *Photoshop* Killer Tips, and it became an instant bestseller because Felix and I were committed to creating something special: A book where every page included yet another tip that would make you nod your head, smile, and think "Ahhh, so that's how they do it."

If you've ever wondered how the pros get twice the work done in half the time, it's really no secret: They do everything as efficiently as possible. They don't do *anything* the hard way. They know every timesaving shortcut, every workaround, every speed tip, and as such they work at full speed all the time. They'll tell you, when it comes to being efficient, and when it comes to staying ahead of the competition: Speed Kills!

Well, what you're holding in your hand is another Killer Tips book:
A book packed cover-to-cover with nothing but those cool little sidebar tips (without the sidebars). Shane Elliot has captured the spirit and flavor of what a Killer Tips book is all about. I can't wait for you to get into it, so I'll step aside and let him take the wheel, because you're about to get faster, more efficient, and have more fun in Flash MX 2004 than you ever thought possible.

Have fun and enjoy the ride!

All my best,

Scott Kelby, Series Editor



Whenever people ask me what Flash is used for, I say, "I have no idea—I just pay some guy to do all my work and copy things I read in other books." They

Win, Lose, or Draw? Draw!

Create Better Effects and Animations

usually look at me for a second and then begin to cry. I can't explain it, but maybe it's because around that time I kick them in the shin. So finally I had to ask someone what Flash's purpose is and here's what they said... "Well, Shane, Flash is first and foremost an animation tool. When it was first used, the sole purpose was to allow for compact, fluid animations that were small in size and nice to look at. The interesting thing is that with the onset of the post-war ethical... blah, blah, blah." That's about the time I phased out of the conversation. What I did learn is that Flash is capable of creating very powerful animations, so I decided to dedicate this chapter to teaching all of you the secrets of making your animations faster, prettier, and better.









CUSTOM GRADIENTS



Let's face it, the default gradients in Flash are pretty much worthless. I'm sure they had their reasons for including these particular gradients, but I can't fathom what they are. Thank God we are able to make our own. To do so, go to the Color Mixer panel (open it using SHIFT-F9) and choose Linear or Radial instead of Solid from the drop-down menu. To edit an existing color, select the little square handle under the Gradient bar (known as a color stop) and choose a new color from the spectrum. To add



a new Color stop, click anywhere along the gradient bar where you see your cursor has a little plus sign next to it. To remove a stop, click it and drag down until you see it disappear. When you have a gradient that you are happy with, click the Color Mixer's panel menu (top right) and choose Add Swatch. You'll now see your new gradient listed along with the other defaults. Custom swatches are visible only for the file you make them in.





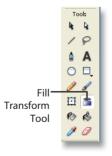


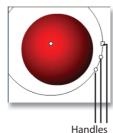


REALISTIC SPHERE



We all know that Flash doesn't support true 3D objects. So how do people make those shapes that appear to be 3D? For example, it would be nice to make a somewhat realistic-looking sphere, don't you think? Let's try it. Draw a basic circle with no stroke and a simple spherical gradient from the default list of gradients in the color picker. Activate the Fill Transform Tool from the Toolbar and select the circle on your Stage. You'll see that you now have four handles that appear, each controlling a different aspect of the gradient. First grab the circle in the center of the gradient and drag it slightly up and to the left. Now grab





the middle handle of the right three and drag it down and to the left so that the gradient appears as though it's a 3D light cast down on a real sphere. You may need to adjust here and there to get the right effect, and turning off Snap To Objects can help your dragging accuracy. Hey, not a bad-looking sphere!





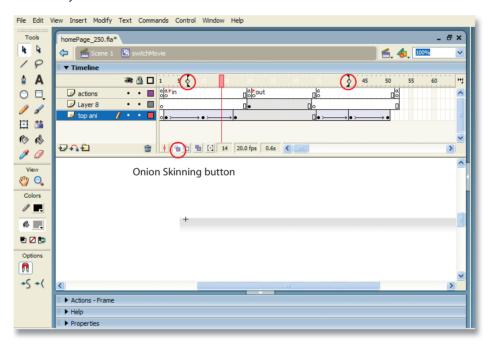




AM I TRIPPING?

For some, this will be useful; for others, just a fun, trippy thing to do every once in a while to impress your friends. When you have any tween or any movement on your Timeline by any means, there is an option in the Flash Timeline to let you view several frames of an animation at a time. This feature is referred to as Onion Skinning, but without the tears. To enable Onion Skinning, look to the bottom of the Timeline directly under the first frame. The second button from the left toggles the Onion Skinning mode.

Once you're in that mode, you can move the black brackets above the Timeline by grabbing their center to cover the desired range you want to be included in the Onion Skinning view. This can be very useful when applying frame-by-frame animation techniques because it enables you to see ahead or behind for a reference.













REALISTIC DROP-SHADOW



With Flash MX 2004, you get built-in set of Timeline Effects and one of them even allows you to create a drop-shadow for any object. The only problem is that the result looks very amateurish. Why not make a more realistic drop-shadow? Start by drawing a simple circle on your Stage. Now select it, copy it using CTRL-C, create a new Layer, and name it "shadow." With the shadow layer selected, press CTRL-SHIFT-V (Paste in Place). This will paste the circle in the exact same position as where you copied it from, but of course on your new layer. Now move that newly pasted circle a few pixels to the right and down so that it goes slightly beyond the original. Next, change the color of the shadow circle to any shade of gray using the Paint Bucket. With the gray circle selected, go





under Modify, then Shape, then choose Soften Fill Edges. Enter 10 for the distance and 40 for the number of steps and then click OK. Finally, move the shadow layer beneath the original layer in the Timeline. The end result is a pretty nice-looking drop-shadow effect, and of course you could follow the same steps for any shape you may have.







CAREFUL WITH THOSE SHAPES





Flash is very unique in the way it handles shapes that overlap each other. For this to work, the shapes mentioned must be on the same layer. Create a blue circle and a red circle on your Stage. Now overlap the red circle with the blue. Now unselect the blue circle by pressing ESC and then move the blue circle away from the red. You'll notice that the blue circle has taken a bite out of the red. Basically, in Flash, if you overlap shapes of different colors, they cut into each other; whereas, shapes of the same color will actually combine to form a unified shape. Many have argued over the usefulness of this behavior, but imagine trying to create a perfect half moon without

this ability. Sure it's possible, but after how much work? I for one think this behavior allows for limitless uses that you can now go out and discover. Go my children, explore.

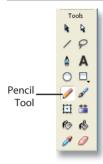








LOOK MA, THEY'RE PERFECT



Ever wondered how Da Vinci drew that perfect circle? He used Flash, of course. Select the Pencil Tool from the Toolbar and make sure to set the Pencil Mode under Options to Straighten. I know, it sounds strange to use Straighten when you want to draw a perfect circle, but trust me on this one. Now draw the best circle you can on your Stage. If you get even marginally close, Flash will make it perfect for you. Now you can try drawing other shapes like ovals, rectangles, and triangles and watch Flash continue to make perfect shapes for you. Of course, Flash can only do so





much, so don't think that drawing some whacked-out circle will result in one that Da Vinci himself would envy. Flash simply does the best it can, so you have to get kinda close.







QUICK, PUT ON THE MASK!





For a simple Mask effect in a few short steps, start by placing some artwork to be the mask on a layer. Now create a new layer and put all your items to be masked on that layer. It is wise to name the layers, so you might as well name them "Mask" and "Masked" respectively. Now comes the hard part. Move the Mask layer so that it is directly above the layer containing the items to be masked. Now double-click the Mask layer, set its type to Mask, and click OK. Flash should automatically include the layer under the Mask layer as being masked and lock both layers for you, which enables you to preview the Mask effect.

If for some reason Flash does not automatically do this (it has its issues), then double-click the Masked layer, set it to Masked, and then lock both layers. That was pretty dern easy now, wadn't it? Yeehaw!









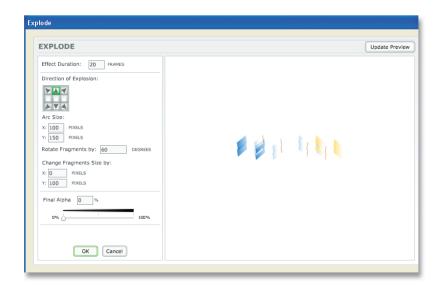


PREBUILT ANIMATIONS

There are a lot of Flash programs out there that have built-in animations and are designed solely to let people animate things without needing to really know how a Flash Timeline



works. Well, guess what? Go ahead, guess. Okay, I'll tell you. Flash now has its own built-in Animations, referred to as Timeline Effects. It's as simple as can be to apply one. Right-click on any object (shape, symbol, and so on) on your Stage and go to Timeline Effects, which will display a list of pre-built effects for you to choose from. Picking any effect will usually bring up a quick little settings window that enables you to specify parameters for the effect. Once you think you have what you want, click OK and Flash does all the work for you. After an effect has been applied, you can easily change it or remove it by selecting Edit or Remove Effect from the same place you picked the effect itself, after right-clicking the object with the effect applied, of course.











GUIDING A MASK OR MASKING A GUIDE



Although creating Motion Guides and Masks can be relatively straightforward, what may not be is how to combine the two effects. Let's say you want to apply a mask to some objects that are part of a Motion Guide. At first you may consider moving your guided layers under your Mask layer, but that will just disable one or the other and make your guided layers masked. Instead, try placing your Mask effect in a movie clip that you create in your Library. Put only your mask and masked layers in the movie clip, and when you have it just the way you want it, you can switch to the Timeline where the guide is or create a guide if one does not exist. Now place your newly created symbol containing your Mask effect on a layer under your guide, attach it to the guide path, set that layer to be guided, and vóila!

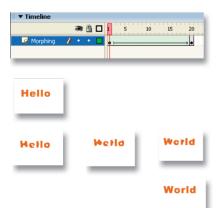
You can now effectively guide a mask. Of course, the same process works in the other direction when masking a guide, but it can require some more time to make sure that your guided animation is fully visible through the area you defined as your mask.







You can use a Shape Tween when you want to move a shape across the Stage or to change a circle into a square. However, you can't apply a Shape Tween to text fields and have them morph from one word to another. Can you? Actually you can, but there are a few steps involved in doing so. As you may or may not know, a text field is not a shape, it's an object, and objects respond to Motion Tweens, not Shape Tweens, so it's time to be clever.



Add some text to the first frame of your Timeline. Now add a keyframe to frame 20 and change the text there to something different from what's on frame 1. Now (with the text field selected) press CTRL-B to Break Apart the text field. At first it will separate the word into individual letter blocks. Press CTRL-B again to break those letters into shapes. Repeat that step for the text on frame 1.

Finally create a Shape Tween to animate between the two keyframes. There it is, a neat little text effect commonly referred to as *morphing*.



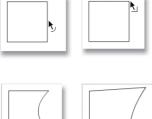








STRETCH IT TO THE LIMIT







What happens when you drag a corner point

There are several applications that are designed to create vector artwork—Flash included, of course. The ways in which these programs enable you to create that artwork, however, is not always the same. Case in point would be the capability in Flash to manipulate shapes you've drawn. Start by drawing a simple circle or square and then activate the Arrow Tool (V). Roll over the edge of the shape you drew until you see a small curved line beside your arrow cursor. Click and drag in any direction. When you let go, you'll see that your once-simple shape is now quite custom. Grabbing points as opposed to a straight area will produce different results.

This ability to manipulate shapes with such ease is a key

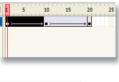
benefit to using Flash, so I suggest you exploit it. There is just no limit to what you can do, so stretch it to the limit one more time!







REALISTIC MOTION









One of the hardest things to do in animation is recreate a realistic movement that you might see in real life. Create a circle, convert it to a symbol, and then create a quick animation using a Motion Tween so that the circle moves up and then back down to its original position (similar to the motion of a ball bouncing). Select any frame in the first Motion Tween, go to the Property inspector, and set the numeric Ease value to 100. Now select any frame in the second Motion Tween and set its Ease value to -100. Play your animation again and you will see that the animation looks very much like a real ball being thrown up into the air.

Any negative number is for easing in, meaning the animation will begin slow and speed up, while a positive value means the opposite. You can also use the slider to change the Ease value instead of typing it in.



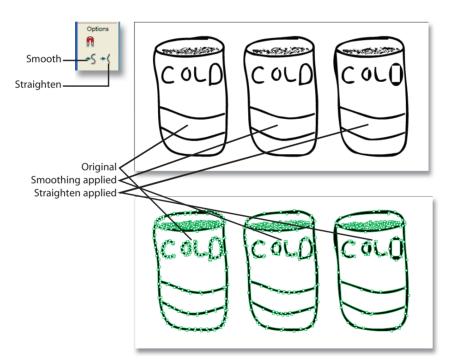






SIMPLIFY YOUR SHAPES

Often, whether you draw a shape by hand in Flash or import vector artwork from another application such as Illustrator or Freehand, there is a similar result—a result that we are often unaware of. Shapes can become overly complex with irregular curves or crooked lines. To simplify these shapes, Flash gives you two options. Click the Arrow Tool and look at the two options at the base of the Toolbar. On the left, you see Smooth, and on the right, Straighten. Both of these options can help to simplify the number of points in your shapes, thereby making the shapes faster to render and reducing your file size a little. To apply either of these effects, simply select a shape, activate your Arrow Tool, and press either button. This will apply the simplification and slightly change the look of your drawing. Oh, and you can apply these multiple times to optimize the shape more and more each time.



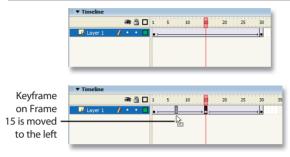








CUSTOM EASING



Setting the Ease value of a tween in the Property inspector is very effective for making some more interesting animations. There is another way to simulate easing without ever changing the Ease value. Create at least a 20-frame Motion Tween of a symbol moving across your Stage. Now add a keyframe in the middle of

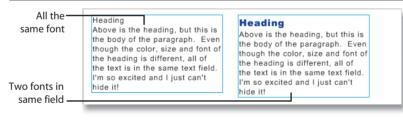
the tween and move it close to the beginning of the animation. If you test your movie, you'll see that it has a similar effect to setting an Ease value for the tween. The difference is that you have more control over this style of easing. You can move that middle keyframe closer to the beginning or end of the tween to get different effects. You can also add more keyframes and move them around to see what happens. Just make sure that you add keyframes after the tween is in place for the trick to work properly.







TEXT BLOCKS, THERE'S ROOM FOR EVERYONE



Text fields are often underestimated. Many of their features go unused or unnoticed by

the average user. One of these features that can be very useful is the handling of more than one font in a given field. Start by creating two or more lines of text on your Stage within the same block. Highlight one of the lines of text and leave the other unselected. Now, using the Property inspector, change any of its properties. This can be very helpful if you want to highlight code in your text as I do in the book like this without having to create several fields and position them individually.

You'll have to make good decisions about when to use this method because it can cause delays if you want to quickly change your fonts.









BITMAPPED TYPE







Painting text with a bitmap image could seem like an advanced task at first. Here's how to make the advanced, very simple by using a mask.

Create a layer named "Text Mask" and place the text you want on the Stage. Create another layer named "Image" and place a bitmap or anything you'd like to show through your text on that layer. Make sure the "Image" layer is under "Text Mask," double-click the "Text Mask" layer, and change its type to Mask. Now change the "Image" layer's type to Masked. Finally, make sure your text is right over the image and lock both layers to preview the effect. This is a rather impressive outcome considering the small amount of work required to accomplish



it. Oh, and I recommend using very bold text to make more of the image visible.

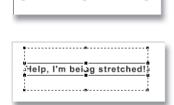






"Help, I'm being stretched!"

RESIZING TEXT FIELDS





There has been a lot of discussion about text fields in this book. There are several tips on changing the size of text blocks and what not. The only thing we haven't talked about is how to actually scale text (stretch it). To do that, just activate the Free Transform Tool, select the text block, and go to town. Guess what? The text field is still editable after you've stretched it all over.

That was a quick tip, wasn't it? Didn't even take long to read. I like that.











I'M FADING FAST



With the introduction of behaviors in Flash MX 2004, a simple fade is an easy thing to create. Okay, that's great, but these behaviors aren't going to work in every situation. What if you wanted a shape to morph into another while it fades out? Not going to happen with a behavior.



The great thing is that even without behaviors, fading effects aren't difficult to create. Create a simple Motion Tween (must be tweening a symbol). On the last keyframe, go to the Property inspector, click the Effects button, and set the Alpha to 0. That's all there is to it. Now you have a basic fade-out effect.



The same thing applies for a Shape Tween. You can use the tip about See Through Shapes to set the right Alpha for a shape. Use behaviors when you can, but keep this one under your hat for those customized situations.









THERE'S TOO MUCH PRESSURE



If you're using a drawing tablet to create artwork in Flash, you're one of the lucky ones. I love these things because they give you a much more natural sense of control over your drawings. Flash even steps up to help you make what you draw as natural as possible.



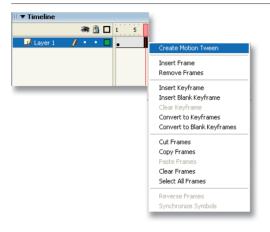
With a tablet installed, activate the Paintbrush Tool in Flash and look at the Use Pressure option just under the word "Options" on the right. Activating this option will tell Flash to sense the amount of pressure you're using while painting, giving your strokes a more natural look. I know several animators who would never use Flash if it didn't have this simple feature. If you don't see the option I'm referring to, then you'll need to go out and buy a tablet to see it.







SUPER FAST TWEENING



There are several actions that we repeat over and over when creating a Flash movie or application. Creating a tween is arguably at the top of this list. That being true, it would only make sense that there would be a super-fast way to create these crazy tweens. Also, it appears that the people at Macromedia have decided that Motion Tweens are even more common than Shape Tweens because this tip only works for Motion Tweens.

If you right-click (OPT-click on Mac) any frame in your Timeline, at the top of the

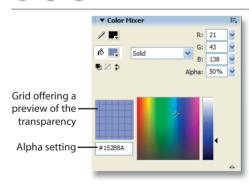
list of options you'll see "Create Motion Tween." Selecting this option will quickly create a Motion Tween for that span of frames. Super fast!







SEE-THROUGH SHAPES



If you've ever wanted transparent text or shapes without going through the hassle of converting them to a symbol first, then you're not alone. Transparency is a fun setting to play with, and it's very easy to do so. When choosing a color (stroke or fill), instead of using the options in the Toolbar or the Property inspector, look at the Color Mixer panel (SHIFT-F9). Turn any color transparent by choosing the color and setting the value in the Alpha field to something



below 100%. The lower the value, the more transparent your color will be. You're even given a little grid underlay so you can preview how transparent the color will be. Now just apply the color as you normally would and bam! Instant transparency without converting to a symbol.







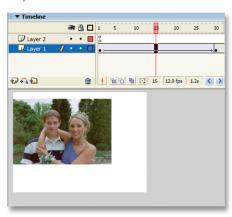


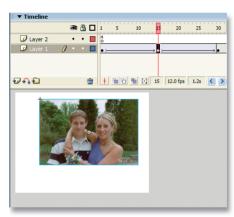


LET FLASH FOLLOW YOUR LEAD

From time to time, I hear about crazy situations where a person has a tween set up, and they decide to add a keyframe to change it somehow. Okay, it's not crazy—it's a pretty common thing, and everyone has needed to do it occasionally. You could do the typical adding of a keyframe to the tween and then move your item on the new frame, but you can do it even quicker. Here's how....

Set up a tween and select any frame in it. Now simply move the object on the Stage to where you want it. Look at the Timeline and you'll see that Flash has added a keyframe for you. No need to even use the pesky keyboard for this one. Flash behaves as any good servant should—it anticipates what the master wants and does the work for the master. That'll do, Flash. That'll do.











DEGREES IN EVERY DIRECTION

Using the Line Tool isn't the most difficult thing to do. You basically just drag the line you want between two points and there it is. It can be hard to create certain angles, though.



So, try holding down the SHIFT key while creating a line, which will enable you to draw lines on any 45-degree angle. You can draw perfectly flat horizontal lines, vertical lines, or a 45-degree angle directly in between. Just another little tip to help take the guesswork out of making your visions come to life.



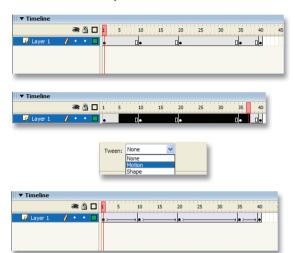






MULTIPLICITY

For the most part, when you want to create a tween of any kind, you select a frame in a frame span and set the Tween option in the Property inspector. However you decide to apply your tween, one thing seems to remain true. You can only create one tween at a time. In actuality, you can add many tweens at once by simply selecting multiple frames that are in different frame spans.



NOTE: A *frame span* is a series of frames between two keyframes.

If you have multiple frame spans that you'd like to animate quickly, just select frames across each span you want to animate and set your Tween in the Property inspector as you normally would. Immediately, all frame spans selected will have the tween applied. This can save a lot of time in a case where you have many layers that have keyframes set properly and just need to be animated. Yeehaw, another time-saver!

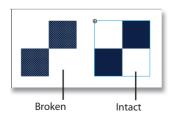






NOW THAT'S SHAPELY

It's a common thing to select some artwork and press F8 to convert it to a symbol, but did you know that you also can convert a symbol instance back into a shape? Select any group or symbol instance on the Stage and press CTRL-B to execute the Break Apart command. This will essentially break the object apart, leaving behind only what was inside of it. So if you had a symbol instance of a circle that was just a shape, then you'd convert that instance back into the shape.



This can be tricky, though. For instance, if you have an object with many other objects inside of it, and you break it apart, you'll end up with all those objects on your Stage. To make sure that you break it completely into shapes, you can simply press CTRL-B over and over until you see that only shapes remain.











ANIMATION TO SYMBOL

Nesting is placing animations inside symbols and symbols in symbols and so on.... It's always a good idea to make use of nesting as often as possible. I for one have often gone off the handle and been so carried away by my wonderful work that I forgot to create a symbol to contain it. I'm sure I'm not alone, right? But it's one thing to convert a selected object that's not moving into a symbol. It's something different to convert an entire timeline. Or is it?

To convert any timeline to a symbol, press CTRL-ALT-A (SHIFT-CMD-A on Mac) while viewing that timeline. You'll notice that this selects the entire timeline and everything on it. Now





press CTRL-ALT-X or OPT-CMD-X on Mac (Cut Frames), then CTRL-F8 to create a new symbol. Name the symbol and press OK. This takes you to your new symbol's timeline. Once here, select the empty keyframe on Frame 1 and then press CTRL-ALT-V or CMD-F8 on Mac to paste your cut frames into the new timeline.

You'll have to clean up your original timeline a bit because it will have empty frames from the cut, but other than that, you're done.

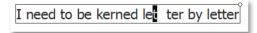






LETTER BY LETTER, I'LL KERN THEM ALL

More and more of you are coming to Flash from a print production background. You're used to using InDesign or Quark, and for many of you Flash is a strange world. Although Flash certainly lacks the text layout power of any good print production program, it does have a little-known ability that could go overlooked. Typically when you select a text field, you are able to set Auto Kern on or off to let Flash adjust the spacing between each letter itself. However, let's say you need only certain letters to have more space between them than others.



Create some text on your Stage and select an individual letter. Go to your Property inspector and set the Character Spacing

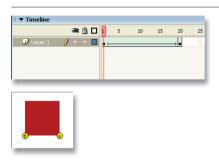
value to 20. Doing this will increase the spacing for that character alone on its right side. You can adjust any letter's spacing to get your own customized kerning. The only problem is that there is no way to save the kerning settings for a letter or font, so you'll have to do this for each letter all the time. It is helpful though, isn't it?







EVEN SHAPES NEED A HINT















In this book, you've heard the term "hint" several times. Normally it has referred to ActionScript. Until now. There is another type of hint in Flash known as a shape hint. Here's an example showing how it works.

Make sure Snap to Objects is enabled, and then create a square on Frame 1 of your Timeline. Now add an empty keyframe on Frame 24 and place a circle of similar size to the Stage. Add a Shape Tween to the frame span so it will morph from a square to the circle. Watch the animation and see how Flash morphs from one to the next. Now go to the first keyframe of the tween and press CTRL-SHIFT-H (SHIFT-CMD-H on Mac). You'll see a small red circle with an "a" in it appear. This is called a shape hint. Press CTRL-SHIFT-H again. Drag the "b" circle up to the bottom-left corner of the square until it snaps in place. Drag the "a" to the bottomright corner. Go to Frame 24 and drag the "b" to the top-right edge of the circle and the "a" to the top left. They should snap in place and turn green to indicate that they're set.

When you replay the animation, you'll see that the same animation morphs in a whole new way. Flash matches the point of each shape hint on each keyframe to that of the next. This enables you to actually control the way your shapes animate. Add as many hints as you like and right-click any of them to remove one or all of them. Doesn't get much more powerful than that.



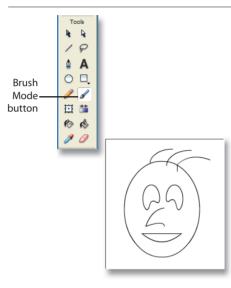








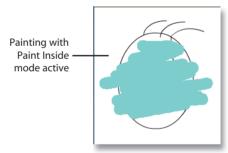
STAY INSIDE THE LINES



I bet you heard this a lot when you were a child. I actually still have people telling me this as an adult. Scary, I know. Luckily, there is a nifty little option that will make staying in the lines a piece of cake when you're creating artwork in Flash.

Create any outline of a shape without a fill color. Activate the Paintbrush Tool and look at the Brush Mode option at the bottom of the Toolbar. Choose Paint Inside, and as long as you start your brush stroke inside the lines, you can scribble as much as you like without ever going outside the lines. Where was this feature when I was doing *Highlights* magazines?

Make sure your outline (stroke) is connected so that Flash can properly determine what the inside is. Oh, and there are other cool Brush modes too. Play with them as well. Also, try starting your brush stroke outside the outlines of your object, and you'll see that Flash will paint only "outside" the closed shape. It's almost as if Flash is treating the outside as an "inside." Weird, huh?





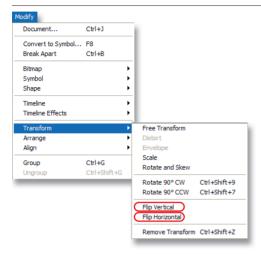






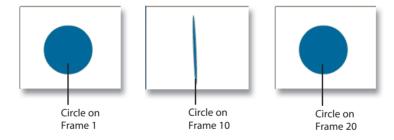


FLIP IT, FLIP IT GOOD



Let's just cut right to the chase on this one. Draw a circle on Frame 1 of your Timeline and convert it to a symbol by selecting it and pressing (F8). Add another keyframe on Frame 20 and add a Motion Tween to the span of frames. On the final keyframe, select the circle instance, go to Modify > Transform, and choose Flip Horizontal. Now watch your animation and you'll see that a nice little coin flip effect is in place.

Of course, you don't have to use this tool for animations only. It can be very helpful when you just need to flip a symbol to face in another direction. And don't forget the Flip Vertical command that appears right next to it.





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